Campfire!

My fire squirmed and struggled as if ill at ease...the flames, now rushing up in long lances, now flattened and twisted on the rocky ground, roared as if trying to tell the storm stories of the trees they belonged to, as the light given out was telling the story of the sunshine they had gathered in centuries of summers.

John Muir

Campfire!

What is it? a controlled opportunity to interpret park resources to a diverse audience in a pleasing facility

Why do we do it? to reach large audiences in a traditional manner

How do we do it? multisensory, participatory

Introduction

The mystique of the campfire is universal. Campfire programs are an essential part of interpretive programming in California State Parks, and visitors look forward to them. Put all that positive energy to work for you! Most visitors who come to parks are on vacation, and they are seeking a slower pace. They come to your campfire program for entertainment as well as to learn more about the park. Take advantage of this prime opportunity to reward them with a well-thought-out program that is fun, educational, and relevant.

This module covers the basics of preparing and conducting a good campfire program. Perhaps the most important things to remember when planning a campfire: have a strong, park-relevant theme that your media-of-choice supports, know your audience, and practice, practice, practice.

> ***Campfires recall our deepest roots as social beings. They inspire the same feelings of warmth, security, and conviviality that our primitive forebears shared around the fire, safe from the dark, cold, lonely, and dangerous world outside its circle of light. Similarly, campfire centers evoke the archetypical park experience. We can relax and enjoy each others' company in the evening at a campfire center. A colleague calls them the park "family room."***
>
> Joann Weiler

Program types

There are many types of campfire programs. We will review four basic types in this module. However, you should remember that just as with all interpretation, the only limit to what you can do is your imagination and creativity. We will introduce the four basic types of campfire programs below and review them in greater detail later in this module.

Basic campfire programs

- **Audiovisual**
- **Guest speaker**
- **Demonstration**
- **Creative techniques**

Audiovisual

Audiovisual (A/V) programs include movies, slide programs, video programs, and audio messages. A/V programs are well-suited for telling sequential stories and providing overviews of park resources. A/V media can transport visitors through time and space to experience significant historic events or dramatic natural processes, and they can interpret fragile or inaccessible resources (Helmich,1997, p. 77). Because A/V programs engage multiple senses, they can be very effective at influencing your audience and can offer today's high-tech audience a format that is both engaging and exciting.

Guest speaker

A guest speaker may be incorporated into your campfire program to provide specific information and expertise beyond your knowledge, but remember the responsibility for the overall program falls to you. People who might be appropriate guest speakers include park management (superintendent, chief ranger, chief of maintenance) and support staff (resource specialist, historian, trail builder). Also consider local experts, including craftspeople, longtime residents of the area, Native Americans, and experts on the area's natural and cultural features. The speaker must be articulate and prepared, and the topic must be relevant and appropriate for the park and audience.

Demonstration

A demonstration is a program that incorporates activities with narrative. It is a practical showing of how something works or is used. To enhance the demonstration use objects, props, and/or audiovisual equipment, and allow audience members to participate. Demonstrations entice visitors to ask questions and can provoke them to think more about what is happening and why.

Creative techniques

Characterizations, storytelling, guided imagery, and puppetry are creative techniques that help to convey interpretive messages. *The Interpreter's Guidebook* (Regnier, Gross, and Zimmerman, 1994, p. 45) describes these techniques:

- **Characterization** – Uses either a historic personality or an imaginary creature who can give insight into a topic.
- **Storytelling** – Uses the age-old method of handing down history and passing along values to others.
- **Guided imagery** – Uses "mental field trips" to take audiences to places far away or perhaps too dangerous to visit in person.
- **Puppetry** – Uses finger puppets or larger than life creatures to make abstract concepts understandable and fun.

Living history characterizations are powerful program tools.

Planning

Appropriate program

Deciding what program you are going to offer depends on many factors. The park's interpretive prospectus and plans, resources, and management issues should definitely be considered. Connecting the visitor to the resource and accomplishing management goals and objectives is paramount. How your program meshes with other programs being offered, and understanding your audience's wants and needs, both influence the methods you plan to use.

Before you select the interpretive type (A/V, guest speaker, demonstration, etc.) to use, you must develop your talk following the techniques outlined in Module 5-Programs.

Develop the talk

- **Select an appropriate topic.**
- **Develop a theme.**
- **Conduct research.**
- **Organize the information.**
- **Decide the best way to convey the message.**

Getting ready

No one enjoys bad surprises; preparation and pretesting are key words. Hopefully, the equipment with which you have been practicing your program in the office is the same type as at the campfire center. Become thoroughly familiar with the equipment, location and function of switches, and the layout of the campfire facility.

Hours, even days, before your program, you should recheck that the facility is as you remember it, confirm the equipment is in place, and make sure all the supplies you need are there. Is the facility clean, safe, and free of unwanted distractions such as litter, graffiti, and/or vandalism? If not, give yourself plenty of time to make the necessary corrections.

Planning

Develop your own checklist. Here are several tips to get you started:

Get ready...get set

- **Agenda**–Prepare a written list of all the items you want to cover. This is your personal "cheat sheet" of program reminders.
- **Equipment operational**–Backup available (spare bulb/projector), check connections and switches, microphone, facility lighting.
- **Props, slides/movie, audio tape, hand-held objects, samples**.
- **Handout materials**–Song sheets, skit text, prizes/giveaways.
- **Jr. Ranger awards**–Have pins and signed certificates ready.
- **Schedule** of upcoming activities and other announcements.
- **Check your appearance** and take care of personal comforts.
- **Flashlight.**
- **Matches, kindling, and dry firewood.** Water to put out the fire.
- **Small first aid kit.**

Busy days seem to get busier just before your program. There are many things you can do to assure success. Nothing can rattle your confidence like being late. Arrive at least one-half-hour before the program is scheduled to begin. Spend this time ensuring the equipment and facility are ready. Prepare your A/V equipment and materials, arrange your props, and construct the fire. This preparation time will build your confidence because you know that everything will go as planned.

Kids arriving early always want to help or see what you are doing. What you are doing is establishing RAPPORT. Allow yourself enough time to mingle and greet people. Chatting with visitors as they arrive will calm your nerves. Take this opportunity to evaluate the audience and tailor the program to get the message across more effectively.

Additionally, pre-program arrival of the audience allows you time to identify possible troublemakers and program distractions. Defuse any problems early by simply assigning jobs such as counting the audience or distributing handouts. Seat potential troublemakers where their behavior can be monitored. We will discuss this further, later in the module.

Appropriate pre-program mood music may be beneficial in a number of ways:

Musical notes

- **Music announces** that something is happening at the campfire center and provides directional clues.
- **Choose music wisely.** It provides foreshadowing for the main program. Use cultural, historic, and/or natural sounds.
- **Music establishes a mood.** It may also help calm the interpreter.
- **Instrumental music** is generally preferable, but exceptions may certainly be appropriate for cultural and historic programs. Natural sounds lend gaiety, mystery, and interaction with your audience. Be sure to keep the selections relevant.

Don't overdo the volume. Music should be in the background.

Advertising

In Module 6-Talks we discussed the effectiveness of extending a personal invitation to visitors to attend scheduled, formal programs. It is well worth the effort. Make sure the park staff is informed and knowledgeable and the interpretive schedules on park bulletin boards are clear and up to date. Additionally, the interpreter should extend an invitation to participants in daytime activities to attend the evening programs, and vice versa. Offer a fixed interpretive schedule that visitors can plan their daily activities around.

Mechanics

Getting started

Beginning

Start on time; do not penalize those who arrive on time. Remember, everyone is on vacation so do not be too rigid about scheduling. If there is something very important at the beginning of the program, then it bears repeating. Your program should last for 45 minutes to an hour, so do not delay your introduction too long. Stay on track, but be a little flexible, especially at the beginning.

Attention getters

- **Have** the on-time "arrivees" yell "CAMPFIRE."
- **Divide** the on-time audience into two groups (right side against left, or adults against kids), and "out yell" each other.
- **Making** group noise is a great energy releaser, establishes a playful mood, and builds a sense of camaraderie.

Establish RAPPORT

Welcome your guests and introduce yourself, other staff who might be assisting, and your agency–California State Parks. People like to know a little about you, so do not be afraid to tell them about yourself. The positive image of the ranger gives you an edge–use it!

Get to know your audience

Quiz the audience to get to know them. Develop your own questions, and mentally note trends, deficiencies, and other anecdotal data that might be helpful. Some suggested questions:

- **First time visitors to the park, first time to the campfire, or first time to your program?**
- **How long have people been coming to the park?** For example, who has visited the most times, years, from the farthest away?
- **How many are camping in tents, in RVs?**
- **How many traveled to the park on bicycles?**
- **How did they learn about tonight's program?**
- **What does the audience know about tonight's topic?**

Reward winners of "Quiz the Audience" with a park map, postcard, or some little relevant prize that will remind them of their visit. The small prize may enhance participation, establish a positive RAPPORT, and it is fun!

Opening

Remember to give your audience a cognitive map. Give them a brief idea of what to expect tonight, such as the length of program and topic.

Use this time to make announcements of upcoming activities scheduled in and around the park. Present Junior Ranger/Junior Lifeguard awards, if appropriate. This is a great time to advertise the program and explain how 7-12-year-olds can get involved. Do not forget to promote the "Litter Getter" program and other interpretive activities.

During "Quiz the Audience" you had an opportunity to ask the audience questions; now is a good time to provide an opportunity for them to get some answers from you. Try to keep their questions related to your program's theme and/or the park resources. See "stump the interpreter" later in this module.

Always repeat the question so everyone can hear what was asked.

By restating the question you gain a moment to decide what you want to say and to confirm that you are answering the question asked.

Fire lighting

Lighting the "campfire" can be accomplished in a number of ways. Use your personal preference as to whether it is a ceremony or a task. You may prefer to have the fire already going when the audience arrives, while others like to light it at the very beginning of the program. Some interpreters use dramatic ways of lighting the fire such as flint and steel, using only one match, "magic," etc., while other interpreters prefer to select someone from the audience to have the honor. Be careful, and always be aware of safety issues around the fire; use the opportunity to demonstrate safety.

Light my fire

- **Use good kindling, paper, and dry wood.**
- **Do not use chemically treated wood or driftwood.** Know how easily or quickly the wood burns and/or if it smokes excessively.
- **Do not forget matches and/or a lighter.**
- **The timing of when to light the fire depends on a number of factors.** If you are showing slides, light the fire early to give it time to die down. If you are doing a demonstration, storytelling, puppets, or other activities you may want the fire to illuminate and enhance the setting.

Warm-up

There is a whole menu of activities to offer the audience during the warm-up. Select the activities that best suit your style and personality and that are compatible with the main program. Not every interpreter is comfortable singing songs or telling stories or quizzing the audience, but surely some of the activities will work for you. Whatever you do, keep the warm-up lighthearted and enthusiastic.

Warm-up activities

- **Songs**
- **Skits**
- **Games and quizzes**
- **Storytelling**
- **Stump the interpreter**

Throughout the warm-up activities, do not be shy about walking into the audience and directly communicating with individuals. The underlying purpose of the warm-up is to establish a rapport with the audience, put them in a receptive mood, and help move the program on to the topic of the evening. Design your warm-up activities so they contribute to the overall success of the program objectives.

Songs

One of the expected traditions at a campfire program is singing songs. The reason singing songs at campfire programs is such a tradition is because it is fun for the group and visitors like to do it! Leadership is much more important than the quality of your singing voice. To conduct singing successfully you need lots of self-confidence, an enthusiastic manner, and strong organization. If you are uncomfortable with singing, it will show, so invite a volunteer or campground host who can carry a tune and who likes to sing to lead the group. Keep the songs simple and easy for the audience to learn.

Sing along

- **Use familiar songs.** Song sheets and/or slides are very useful, but make sure lighting is adequate to read them.
- **Briefly go over the words and tune.**
- **Enlist someone to help you.**
- **Start the song with everyone together.**
- **Use gestures to keep time and rhythm.** Do not let the song drag.
- **Maintain contact with all of the audience.**
- **Use a variety of songs (rounds, humorous, slow, fast).** Usually songs with a faster tempo are better at the beginning with slower songs at the end.
- **Incorporate audience "actions" with the words**–clap hands, stand up on a phrase or word, sway like a tree, etc.

Mechanics

Skits, games, and stories are a great way to provide variety in your program. If you are really uncomfortable with singing, then skits may provide the traditional lightheartedness to the warm-up.

Skits

Audience participation is the key to success here. Skits are intended to be fun, to develop camaraderie, and, at their very finest, to lead the way into the theme of the main program. Most people enjoy being involved in these stories and skits, especially children, and it is fun to see parents' responses as they watch their children perform. Do not limit it to just adults or children, and do not force anyone to participate.

Generally, numerous individuals have parts to play, but if possible the skit should include the rest of the audience as a group. If you have more volunteers than parts, have several people play a part together; the more people who are actively involved the better. It is important to allow everyone, including the audience, to practice their parts. The narration or script should be easy to read, and the story should be straightforward to follow. The sayings, words, sounds, and/or actions each player makes should be easy to learn, perform, and remember.

There are numerous tried-and-true scripts to choose from, but they run the risk of being overused and tiresome. Strive to write your own skit that incorporates features of your park and ties to the theme of the main program. Personalizing your skit makes it easier for you to narrate, shows the audience you are really interested in your subject, strengthens your message, and adds originality and spontaneity to the program.

Games and quizzes

Often it is more effective to present information in the form of a game or quiz than to simply tell the audience. Design games or quizzes that lead up to, develop, and support the program's theme.

Friendly competition can be fun, lively, participatory, and educational. It adds a measure of excitement to the program. Divide the audience in half or thirds, and have them compete with each other. The interpreter poses questions, most of which should be related to the theme of the program, and then "judges" which group has the correct answer. The reward for the winners might be a round of applause by the losers, but everyone will be winners because you have actively engaged them and have provided additional theme information. See Module 12-Evaluation to discover how to incorporate games and quizzes to evaluate your program's effectiveness.

Skits

- **Voice** inflections and volume
- **Body** movements and gestures
- **Outrageous** actions or sounds

All of these actions contribute to the merriment of a skit.

Quiz answers

- **Repeat** the correct answer so that everyone can hear.
- **Capitalize** on the answer with your more in-depth explanation.

Stump the interpreter

A warm-up technique that provides great interaction between the interpreter and audience, benefiting both, is "stump the interpreter." It offers an opportunity for the audience to ask that question they are just "itching" to know. It is an opportunity for the interpreter to establish a rapport, be human, and impart information.

The main tenet for all interactions is honesty. If you do not know the answer to a question, admit it.

> ***I was gratified to be able to answer promptly. I said, I don't know.***
>
> Mark Twain

Perhaps someone in the audience will have the answer. If not, and the question is answerable, have a plan to get the answer to the questioner at a later time. You could have interested audience members check at the visitor center, entrance station, or campground host site for the answer the next day. But do not forget to warn the staff to expect inquiries. If you cannot find an answer, offer to continue looking and suggest some places they might research. Be prepared to make a real effort and to follow through. Another great technique is to have postcards you hand out to visitors who had questions you could not answer. Have them write their name, address, and question on the postcard. Mail it to them when you find the answer. This is wonderful public relations for you and the Department.

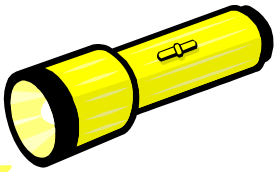
Caution!

Do not overspend your allotted time on the warm-up, generally not more than 10 - 15 minutes. The audience may be having a good time, but allow yourself sufficient time for the main part of the program.

Transition

Use final warm-up activities to focus the audience on the program's theme. Plan your warm-up with care. Everyone wants to enjoy the evening activities, and generally you can take this time to develop RAPPORT and get the audience to focus. It is important to make a smooth transition from the playful warm-up to the more educational segment of the program.

You should not expect the audience to transition from an excited, interactive warm-up to a totally receptive "listen to my story" mind-set without some time and assistance. Choose your transitional activities wisely. Calm the activities at the end of the warm-up and begin the introduction into your program. If you are singing at the end of the warm-up conclude with a slower song. A story or "stump the interpreter" question that directly relates to your evening's topic may be an ideal opportunity to transition to the program. Be creative–seize the opportunity.



About those flashlights

Before the main program begins, invite everyone to shine their light on the screen, on your face, the stars, etc. Let them get it out of their system. Then ask them to turn their flashlights off until the program is over.

Conducting programs

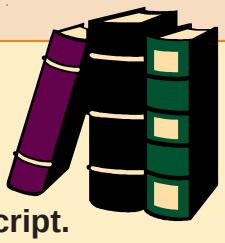
Slide presentation

If you use slides to supplement your talk, remember they are simply a visual aid that is used to support your program. The pictures should illustrate the talk, rather than the talk being a series of verbal captions for the pictures.

Steps in creating a slide program

Think of slides as props. Develop your talk before you select the slides that will help illustrate the story and reinforce your theme. Here are a few tips for creating a slide program:

Creating a slide program



- Select the topic.
- Develop a theme and objectives.
- Research.
- Organize the information.
- Utilize the 2-3-1 process and develop the script.
- Integrate story with visualized illustration on a storyboard.
- Select slides.
- Construct the program.
- Practice your delivery and know your equipment.

As you are developing your story, visualize how you would like it illustrated. Before you go looking for slides, develop a storyboard. "A storyboard is just a visual plan in which you indicate the kinds of slides that would be best to show in each part of the program, and where they should change. As you do this, you'll undoubtedly make small changes in the script to accommodate or capitalize on the visuals you select." (Ham, 1992, p. 358).

The format for the storyboard is a matter of personal preference. One method is to put the script on note cards and next to the script draw or annotate the visual that would best illustrate the point being made. Later the note cards can be used to practice your talk. Using note cards may be preferable to developing the program on a sheet of paper, because note cards can be moved to accommodate more/less text and illustrations as you refine your program.

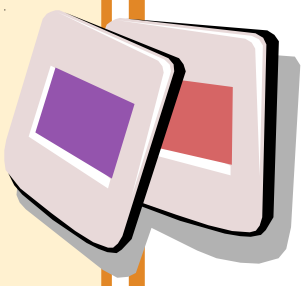
Find the best possible slides. When selecting slides use good quality images.

Only use slides that...

- Illustrate the point being discussed.
- Have good color.
- Are properly exposed.
- Are in focus and clean.
- Have variety and sequencing for effect.

Building the program

- **Use a light table, and lay out your slides in sequence, allowing space between each slide for additional insertions and ease of moving around.**
- **Once you are satisfied with the sequence, number the slides in order.**
- **If you are doing a two-projector program, alternately insert slides between the two trays.**
- **Correct slide placement is upside down, emulsion-side toward screen.**
- **Be sure both vertical and horizontal slides fit on the screen.**



Constructing your program

Title and text slides might be useful for some programs. Make sure to use a bold, easy to read font, with good contrast between letters and background. Allow enough time for the audience to comprehend each slide. Do not have too much text. Short text can be incorporated effectively by laying it over the photo–see Eastman Kodak's website for "sandwiching slides" and other creative techniques. Do not overuse text slides, because they can disrupt the flow of the talk. Remember, you cannot expect visitors to read the slide and listen to you at the same time. This can cause the program to become very choppy.

Use variety, including alternating between close-up and vista slides, using black and white or sepiatone, and sequencing from far away to closer or vice-versa. Do not leave slides on the screen longer than 15 seconds. Slides that require more viewing time to understand are probably too complicated; find a better slide to make your point. Maps and graphs that need explaining may be the exception.

Finding slides

- **Reference slide file** (park, CSP photo archives, other agencies, and partners)
- **Take your own photos.**
- **Purchase slides/photos.**
- **Use copy stand to make slides from printed materials.**

Use a blackout slide to begin and end your program (newer projectors do this already); never have a bright white screen. Better still, have your first slide ready when you turn on the projector and end with an inspirational, impressive slide. Remember, do not talk while the last slide is still showing. Give your audience a moment to think about what you have presented. Silence is sometimes the most effective way to make a point.

Mechanics

If you cannot find a good slide to illustrate your program, what should you do? Modify your talk, temporarily at least, to eliminate the point, or adjust your talk to make a point you can illustrate. Let staff know what slides you need and continue searching. Do not use a weak fill-in slide.

Tips for showing slides effectively

Do

- **Practice**, practice, practice!
- **Go** through your program until you are confident you know it and the equipment very well.
- **Know** the order of the slides without having to look at the screen.
- **Memorize** your outline, not the talk.
- **Face** your audience.
- **Use** your voice rather than gestures, since the audience is looking at the screen more than at you.
- **Use** voice inflections to keep the narration interesting.
- **Let** the slide speak for itself. Avoid "this is a slide of…" and "here is a…" It is okay to call attention to details in the slide–"look closely at…"–to pull the audience into the scene.

Don't

- **Stand** between the projected slide and your audience.
- **Keep** turning around to see what slide comes next; you should already know.
- **Stab** or flit pointer around the screen–use it only minimally if you must use a pointer (stick or laser) at all.
- **Use** distracting habits, as the audience can still see everthing you do even with the lights out.
- **Read** from a script. The narration should slightly precede the next slide.

Special effects can be accomplished with ordinary slides. Try using a blank slide with a pin hole to serve as a spotlight. Incorporate slide "masks" to progressively reveal more or less information. For example, you accomplish this by sequencing copies of the same slide, revealing more/less information on each copy. Each advance thereby gives a zoom in/out effect.

Anticipate the upcoming slide. Avoid advancing to a new slide before you are ready for it. If you change too soon, the listener will become confused as to the meaning of the new slide. Do not apologize for your slides or your program. Do not panic if the equipment (e.g., a bulb) fails. Rely on your preplanning efforts and remember–you know the story; the slides are there just to help illustrate it.

Whether you use one projector, a two-projector lapse dissolve, or a LED projected software presentation, the mechanics for developing and presenting the program are much the same. Refer to Module 11-Audiovisual.

Guest speaker

Guest speakers can add variety, substance, and innovation to your program. Practically every location has people who are experts in a specific field who would be appropriate for a campfire program. Do not overlook the expertise you have in staff and volunteers. The local community may have an "old-timer" who has watched the surrounding area develop, or a local expert in flora and fauna. Judge wisely.

Establish a RAPPORT with the guest speaker long before the program. Thoroughly discuss expectations (yours and the speaker's), know his/her personal/professional background, and develop a mutually agreeable introduction. Make sure the speaker is aware of the composition of the evening's program. Incorporate warm-up materials that will lead into the guest speaker's presentation. Agree on the time allotment and how you will signal the speaker to end the presentation.

It should be clearly understood what the topic is, how the speaker will present the topic, and what conclusions will be made. Although the guest speaker is in front of the audience, the interpreter is still the one responsible for the program. At a minimum, the welcoming, warm-up, and closing will be your responsibility.

There are hazards to keep in mind when using a guest speaker. An expert may give a lecture, not an interpretive talk with a theme. Unless you know the speaker's ability in subject matter and manner of presentation, it may be best not to experiment with your audience. Your time with the audience is too valuable. Not only do you need to know your audience's needs and desires, you also need to know your guest speaker's abilities.

Research a guest speaker's qualifications and abilities *before* you make that first invitation.

Movie

"Video images capture attention in today's world because television is so much a part of most of our lives. Videos and movies, when used correctly, can supplement and reinforce program themes, but should not replace the words and thoughts of an actual interpreter" (Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources, 2001, p. B-20).

Showing a movie

- Film should be queued up and ready to go. Be sure to give credit to the producers, etc.
- Place the audio speaker(s) as close to the screen as possible.

Videos and movies should be used sparingly, and not as a crutch. They must be properly introduced and relate to and support the theme of the main program. Use them to supplement your personal presentation on the topic. Simply turning the projector on and showing a film is not an interpretive presentation. Plan an introduction and follow-up discussion (see Module 11-Audiovisual).

Many films are taken in other locales. Help visitors to understand how these films relate to them and the park they are visiting. Point out specific episodes or relationships which may illustrate points you want to emphasize. After the film, a relevant conclusion should be given.

Demonstration

As with a talk, a demonstration should be a strong thematic presentation. The interpreter may or may not be the one doing the demonstration. They range from the interpreter explaining, demonstrating, and showing examples of one step in a process and/or activity, to the audience participating in the activity/ process. The audience, or at least individuals from the audience who are actively participating, may actually gain a new skill.

Historic and cultural sites are common venues for demonstrations, but demonstrations can also be effective at recreational locations. Often interpretive objectives can best be attained through demonstration. You are still telling a story with a theme and objectives, but making use of objects, activities, and props to tell the story.

One of the main drawbacks of the demonstration at a campfire program is visibility. The object you are using or the activity you are demonstrating may not be visible to all. Smaller venues work well. Be cognizant of how you can illuminate the demonstration effectively. Most times bright ambient light is best. This may necessitate starting your campfire program earlier, while there is still daylight.

Demonstration suggestions

- **Clothes, gear, and tools of an 1800s mountain man, 1840s homemaker, or 1850s miner -** Help the visitor understand events, issues, and hardships of early inhabitants of your area.
- **Camping skills and equipment -** The underlying message might be safety, resource protection, or appreciation of the outdoors.
- **Trail building -** Show the skills and effort it takes to keep the trails open and still be sensitive to the resources.
- **Care and use of fire-fighting equipment -** Aim at preventing forest fires.

> ***We may misunderstand, but we do not misexperience.*** Vine Deloria, Jr.

Characterization

Costumed interpretation of a real or imaginary creature requires considerable preparation, but the rewards may be great. "Characters engage the imagination and evoke a whole range of emotions–humor, drama, pathos. Characters humanize events and concepts, making them personal and real to visitors" (Regnier, et al., 1994, p. 46).

There are two basic types of characterizations: first person characterization, sometimes called living history, and costumed, or third person, interpretation. In first person, the interpreter *becomes* the character in every aspect: dress, dialogue, mannerisms, and delivery. The interpreter must know the character and the time period so well that he/she can ad lib responses. The interpreter is the character at all times. In third person, the interpreter may look like a person from a particular era, but he/she speaks about the people and events of the portrayed time period from a more current perspective.

The decision to portray your character in either first or third person is a critical issue for preparation. First person generally requires another person to prepare the audience to meet someone from the past. To be truly effective, a first person interpreter needs to have theatrical skills. In first person, you cannot answer modern day questions and you must stay "in character." Third person interpretation allows you to recognize more current issues and terminology while in costume.

Ways to make your characters believable

- **Clothing** – Choose comfortable, authentic wear with appropriate age indications.
- **Makeup** – Use sparingly. Most of the time the best makeup is the real thing–mud, dirt, grease, flour.
- **Details** – Small items make your character come alive, especially those things that contribute to sensory awareness of the audience–smoke, food, music, tools, or other items that are connected to the era. The stage for your character can be enhanced with other visual effects–candles, kerosene lantern, rocking chair, or any prop that helps convey the time period of the character.

To portray someone successfully takes a lot of skill and practice. Allow plenty of time to develop your specific character. The character should have a name, a history, and a personality, and must support your theme. You will have the best results if you choose common characters. For example, become John Bidwell's neighbor, not John Bidwell himself. Most audience members will relate better to the common person.

Storytelling

Everyone loves to listen to a story–if it is well told. Storytelling is as old as humanity itself. When a story is well told, it is one of the best ways to get your audience receptive and warmed up. Anyone can learn to tell stories; we tell stories daily when we describe an adventure we have had or a movie we have recently seen. *Good* storytellers have the ability to transport listeners to the scene being described and make them feel involved in the story. *Great* storytelling is a special gift and an art that not everyone possesses, but anyone can learn to tell good stories. All it takes is the ability to be creative in describing a scenario and the willingness to practice, practice, and practice.

Storytelling has been traditionally used around a campfire, and it is a powerful tool in the interpreter's repertoire. Storytelling offers a special magic. Stories provoke interest and emotion, and they are great for explaining why we celebrate different events and the meaning behind traditions and legends. Throughout the world, we discover stories that teach values, attitudes, and philosophies. Through these stories we learn about the culture and the character of those people.

Select stories that are relevant to your interpretive theme. As a storyteller, your goal is to become, for a brief moment, something other than the person standing in front of the group–to create a whole new world using words, sounds, gestures, and expressions. In doing so, remember to tell a story, not a memorized speech. Memorize the sequence of images for the story, but not the words. This allows you to be spontaneous and creative. Your voice and gestures should make every member of the audience feel as if you are talking directly to him or her.

Sequence of a good story

- **Setting the scene** – "Once upon a time" or "long, long ago"
- **Development** – Pull the audience in, sustain the interest, and build up the tension
- **Crisis** – The height of the tension
- **Solution** – Relief of that tension
- **Moral or wrap-up**

Mechanics

Listening to stories is a universal longing; telling a good story is a venerable skill. The best way to develop this skill is to practice. If you are not good at storytelling, do not do it for a park audience until you are!

Storytelling - do

- **Speak** clearly and loudly with plenty of inflection.
- **Speak** at a measured pace, neither too fast nor too slow.
- **Wear** a mask if you are shy about storytelling, but make sure all can hear.
- **Tell** a relevant story that you really like.
- **Use** silence, pause for effect, and whisper to catch attention.
- **Use** sound effects to emphasize a point.
- **Tell** the story spontaneously rather than reading from a script.
- **Practice,** practice, and practice.

Storytelling - don't

- **Tell** a story you do not really like.
- **Begin** with an apology.
- **Start** with long story introductions.
- **Use** annoying/unwelcome body language and facial expressions.
- **Read** the story.
- **Speak** in a monotone.
- **Express** personal opinions or bias.
- **Get** sidetracked.
- **Leave** your listeners without a resolution to the story's conflict.
- **Begin** to talk immediately after finishing your story.
- **Use** a fake or affected voice.
- **Use** weak or distracting gestures.
- **Be** someone who you do not like.
- **Be** too detailed.

adapted from Crosson and Stailey

Guided imagery

Guided imagery is a process of creative visualization or guided fantasy. It allows you to mentally take the audience to places, times, or events they cannot or should not experience physically. It is important that the audience is willing to take this journey, and they must trust the interpreter in order to fully enjoy the experience.

Begin the journey by getting the audience as comfortable as possible. Help them relax by listening to the wind, the babble of the nearby creek, or other white, natural noise. Use your voice to help them discard distracting thoughts. Take your time–pauses allow the audience to get in the mood.

Ask your audience to close their eyes, and encourage them to create mental images triggered by your verbal, virtual trip. Then describe, with as lively a narration as possible, the scene, situation, or process you desire to show them. Their active involvement, rather than mere listening, makes for greater understanding and retention. An example of a guided imagery program is a description of the travels of a water molecule through the water cycle from vapor to cloud to earth and back again.

Virtual travel

- **Guided imagery is not effective if there are distractions.** Read your audience, and let them know ahead of time what to expect. A crying baby or group of unruly teens will spoil the whole mood.
- **Everyone "sees" the journey a little differently.** A beneficial technique is to ask members of the audience to share their trip. Different and interesting insights and revelations may be discovered.
- **The audience needs to be comfortable**, peaceful, relaxed, and in a receptive mood.
- **It is the interpreter's job to ensure** the environment is conducive for creative visualization.

Puppetry

Puppets have been used for thousands of years to entertain and educate, and to comment on society and politics. Puppet programs are an excellent way of communicating resource information and values to children and adults alike. Puppets command attention and are enjoyed by audiences of all ages. They allow for interaction with the audience and convey controversial issues in a fun and non-threatening manner. They can be employed to help individuals see critical issues from a variety of perspectives, as well as to better appreciate the world around them. Through stories, songs, improvised dialogues, and jokes, live puppetry can engage and focus the attention, imagination, and emotions of audiences on important interpretive concepts (Helmich, 1997, p. 86).

Using puppets

- **Move the puppet's mouth "in sync" with what it is saying.**
- **Open and close the mouth with each syllable.**
- **Move the lower jaw.** The puppet's head should remain level.
- **Stay in character.**
- **Puppets should make eye contact with the audience.** You should talk to the puppet and be a good listener.
- **Let the puppet carry the program.**
- **Develop a distinct personality and voice for each puppet.**
- **Keep the program short and active.**

adapted from Regnier, et al.

Closure

Do not just come to the end of your program and stop without some closure of your theme. If appropriate, end the program with a thought-provoking "needle" that will stay with the audience.

Close on time. Do not draw the program out. People have other things to do and so do you. Invite the audience to come up and talk with you or the guest speaker. Be a gracious host; answer questions, clarify issues, and gain valuable feedback on your program. As nice as compliments are, you may discover the questions they ask can be most helpful in improving your program. Do not be in a hurry to leave.

Consider offering informal after-campfire activities such as just plain visiting with the interpreter while roasting marshmallows or popping popcorn, stargazing, or taking a stroll in the dark. You can also use this time to conduct appropriately planned evaluation measures. Occasionally there are people who want to visit with other members of the audience. Be sure you make them feel welcome; encourage them to linger by the fire for a while. If they wish to remain after you have stored the equipment, extinguished the fire, closed up, and are ready to leave, be sure to warn them you are turning out the lights in a moment.

Suggested time allotment

- **Opening, introduction, welcome, and announcements** - 10 minutes
- **Warm-up** - 10 to 15 minutes
- **Transition** - 5 minutes
- **Program** - 15 to 20 minutes
- **Closure** - 5 minutes

Other considerations

Alternative plans

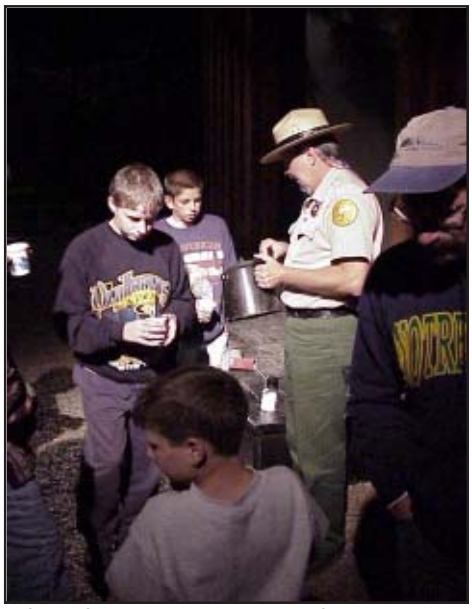
The campfire program is a production, and there are many elements that contribute to its success. When you finish a program and are feeling good, you should remember it worked because of a considerable amount of group effort. The entire park staff contributes to the success of any program.

A good interpreter will have clear alternative plans in case there are such problems as a power outage, equipment failure, weather issues, etc. As with all emergencies, preplanning the what-ifs is vitally important. Discuss with staff and mutually agree on what to do when things do not go right. There will be times when one or more emergencies occur, and you will be glad you worked with your colleagues to develop a plan for issues such as the following:

Planning for the what-if problems

- **Who decides when to cancel a program,** and how do you notify staff and the potential audience of the cancellation? There should be consistency in this cancellation decision.
- **Is there an alternate location** that would accommodate the program in a timely manner?
- **Is backup equipment available,** and what is its location?

Good interpreters should be able to go on with the show without electricity or the planned equipment. You may need to alter your presentation, consider the safety and comfort of the audience, and/or decrease the length of the campfire program. Simple inconveniences should not automatically cancel a program. Assume your audience members came to the park just to see your program...do not disappoint them!



When the power goes out, the old-fashioned campfire still works.

Disruptions

The skills you are developing as an interpreter will serve you well in handling disruptive situations at a campfire program. Remember this is a noncaptive audience; people are here for the most part to have fun and learn about the park's resources. Using your pleasant people skills will usually correct the problem. Good judgment, a calm demeanor, and appropriate action when handling disruptive issues are skills you will refine as you develop as an interpreter. Do not fail to observe or hesitate to discuss with other interpreters how they handle various situations.

Sometimes you can anticipate a problem and defuse it before it becomes disruptive. Ask the overly energetic child to assist with some aspect of the program, such as counting the number of people in attendance or helping lead a song. Invite the rowdy bunch in the back to come closer to the front so that they can "see better." Enlisting audience and peer pressure can be effective. Discreetly "discussing" the issue with the troublemaker may *sometimes* be necessary. Call on the help of volunteers, park hosts, and/or other staff in the audience. Teamwork certainly helps.

The bottom line is you have put a lot of effort into your program. The vast majority of the audience is receptive and appreciative of your efforts, so do not let those very few and occasional distractors ruin the experience for all. Deal with them in a professional manner; do not just ignore them.

Props and handouts

Handheld objects, examples, and written materials are often helpful in strengthening a program. Because you are trying to show items to a large number of people in a limited amount of time, specific display and distribution techniques should be used.

Good lighting is critical. What might be easy for the few visitors in the front row to see can be completely lost for those in the back. Be aware of any glare, hold the object up high, walk up the aisle so everyone can get a better look, and let the audience know they are welcome to take a closer look at the end of the program. Tune in to how receptive the audience is; if there is an increase in fidgeting, that is a strong indication you have lost their attention.

If the object you are planning to pass around is expendable, have several to pass, not just one. Starting an object in the front row and expecting it to flow through the audience in a timely fashion does not work. If it is a large, fragile, precious, or dangerous object, make sure you explain the finer details and do not pass it around. Consider using a graphic, a handout, an image of the item projected on a screen, or a larger-than-life model. Refer to Module 6 for additional techniques.

Enlist assistance to distribute objects and materials to the group. Once again, volunteers, park hosts, and/or other staff in the audience might lend a hand.

Feedback

Visiting with individuals after the program can be a rewarding experience for all involved. This informal conversation affords the visitor an opportunity to ask questions and clarify issues. It permits you an opportunity to socialize and gain valuable feedback on your program.

This evaluative feedback can be further strengthened when you have incorporated the Visitor RAPPORT Survey (DPR 461A). In order to ensure quality data, randomly distribute the forms, along with a pencil, to four or five members of the audience. Request that the selected individuals not look at or fill out the survey until *after* completion of the program. Implement whatever strategy is necessary to promote completion of the survey only at the *conclusion* of the program. It is helpful to have another staff member or a park volunteer distribute the surveys and ask for cooperation. Direct the evaluator to leave the completed survey at a location such as the projection booth, rostrum, on the seat, etc., so they can remain anonymous. By not having to hand the evaluation directly to you, they may be more direct and open in their comments. Module 12-Evaluation thoroughly describes how to assess your presentation without bias.

Continually seek quality evaluation of your programs.

Follow-up

Your program is completed, everything went pretty well, you're tired, and want to get on to all the other "stuff" you have yet to do, but now is not the time to just lock up and leave. Make sure you get everything ready for those following you. Attention to detail makes all the difference for successful interpretive programs.

Last but not least

- **Have** you stored the equipment properly?
- **Does** any equipment or the facility need attention?
- **Are** all materials and supplies replenished?
- **Do** any issues need to be discussed before the next program?
- **Have** you and the rest of the staff established a procedure for dealing with issues?
- **Did** you record attendance and other statistical data? (DPR 918)

Campfire programs can be successful without the use of slides. The incorporation of a guest speaker or a demonstration may be the mainstay or just a portion of any program. Certainly the old-fashioned type of campfire that incorporates songs, stories, readings, local history, musical instruments, puppets, and/or other interactive forms of participation can be fun, educational, and enthusiastically received.

A campfire program is a formal, audience-participation activity that is conducted in a specified location. Campfire programs may assume various forms and do not always have to take place at night. An early morning coffee with the interpreter at the campfire center may draw those early risers and be a pleasant way for the visitor and interpreter to start their day.

What's ahead

In Module 9 we will turn our attention to addressing an important and specific audience–children. Children's interpretation has long been recognized as being unique. Tilden said, "Interpretation addressed to children should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach." Module 9-Kids! will explore the purpose and values of children's interpretation and how to successfully provide these programs.

Literature cited

Crosson, V., and Jay C. Stailey. *Spinning Stories: An Introduction to Storytelling Skills.* Library Development Division, Texas State Library, 1988.

Ham, Sam. *Environmental Interpretation: A Practical Guide for People with Big Ideas and Small Budgets.* Golden, CO: North American Press, 1992.

Helmich, Mary A. *Workbook for Planning Interpretive Projects in California State Parks.* Sacramento, CA: California Department of Parks and Recreation, 1997.

Interpreter's Guidebook 2001. Indiana Department of Natural Resources: Division of State Parks and Reservoirs, Division of Forestry, 2001.

Regnier, Kathleen, Michael Gross, and Ron Zimmerman. *The Interpreter's Guidebook: Techniques for Programs and Presentations.* 3rd ed. Stevens Point, WI: UW-SP Foundation Press, Inc., 1994.

Strauss, Susan. *The Passionate Fact.* Golden, CO: North American Press, 1996.

Weiler, Joann. *Guidelines for Designing Campfire Centers.* Sacramento, CA: California Department of Parks and Recreation, 1990.

Additional references

Hooper, Jon. *Effective Slide Presentations: A Practical Guide to More Powerful Presentations.* Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997.

MacDonald, Margaret. *The Storytellers Start-up Book: Finding, Learning, Performing, and Using Folktales.* Little Rock, AK: August House Publishers, Inc., 1993.

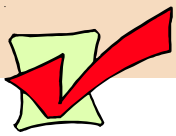
National Storytelling Association. *Tales as Tools: The Power of a Story in the Classroom.* Jonesboro, TN: Riverbank Press, 1994.

Stecker, Elinor. *Slide Showmanship: How to Put on a Terrific Slide Show.* New York, NY: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1987.

Summers, Lee. *A Bag of Tricks: Ideas for Campfire Warm-ups.* Sacramento, CA: California Department of Parks and Recreation and Monterey Bay Natural Historical Association, n.d.

Campfire!

Self assessment



Answer each question in the section below before reviewing the material in Module 8-Campfire!. The answers are not provided. Check your answers with your colleagues and as you read Module 8-Campfire!. Items from the self assessment may be reviewed and discussed in class.

1) Describe two different types of campfire programs.

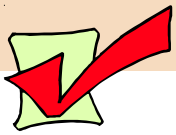
2) You should always light the campfire before visitors arrive to your program.
   a) True
   b) False

3) List three benefits of using music at a campfire program.

4) Which of the following activities are appropriate methods of conducting a warm-up during a campfire program? (Circle all that apply.)
   a) Songs
   b) Games
   c) Quizzes
   d) Skits

5) A slide presentation is developed using a fundamentally different approach from that of other interpretive programs. (Explain your answer.)
   a) True
   b) False

6) When preparing a slide presentation, you should find your slides first, then build your program around the slides.
   a) True
   b) False



Self assessment

7) What is a storyboard?

8) Name three ways of finding and obtaining slides for your program.

9) Which of the following are recommended practices for conducting a slide presentation? (Circle all that apply.)
   a) Face the screen to keep organized
   b) Do not use animated body language
   c) Reference each slide as it appears
   d) Use only high quality slides

10) Describe two ways to improve characterizations.

11) Guided imagery should only be used with children.
   a) True
   b) False

12) Storytelling is most effective if you:

a) Start with a detailed introduction
b) Tell stories that express your personal opinions
c) Tell the story in your own words
d) Read the story from a script

13) With adults as the primary audience, describe a situation where puppets would be the method of choice for conveying a message.

14) How can you handle a disruptive visitor at a campfire program?

Now that you have completed the self assessment questions, review the material in Module 8-Campfire! to confirm your answers. After reading the module, move on to the workbook learning activities, which will assist you in developing your skills.

Workbook learning activities

To help you review and apply the material covered in Module 8-Campfire!, a selection of review questions and/or activities is provided. Again, no answers are included. Use the material from the module, outside sources, and your colleagues to help you complete the activities and answer the questions. There may be more than one right answer. Use the questions and activities to generate discussion about the material. Be prepared to discuss, perform, or demonstrate your answers in class.

1) Create a short skit to be performed by visitors that addresses a resource protection message. The skit should have at least five characters and incorporate actions and/or words that assure audience involvement as well.

2) You arrive one-half hour early for your evening slide presentation around the campfire. You discover the electricity is out in the amphitheater. Describe how you would handle this situation.

Take it to your park

Answer each question with the information specific to your park. You will have to conduct some research in order to answer each question. Use the answers as a guide for beginning your career in California State Parks.

Campfire!

Park name_____

1) Develop an inventory of the equipment, props, materials, etc., that are available in your park for conducting campfire programs.

2) Brainstorm an appropriate theme for a campfire program.

3) Prepare an agenda, in outline form, for the above program.

4) Design one warm-up activity to conduct for the program.

5) Create an advertisement for your campfire program.